



Trades Union Congress

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Deputy High Commissioner
High Commission for the People's Republic of
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our ref bhr/ituc/bangl/tamp
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Dear Deputy High Commissioner

DEADLY FIRE AT THE TAMPACO FACTORY, DHAKA

On behalf of the TUC, its 51 affiliated unions and 5.8 million British workers, I am writing to express our horror at the tragic death of 34 workers and injuries to more than 40 in the fire at the paper packaging factory, Tampaco Foils Ltd in Dhaka on 10 September. It is shameful that the owner of the factory, the former BNP Member of Parliament, Syed Mokbul Hussain was reported by the police to have disappeared after the fire, in the wake of legal action against him, the fire and rescue service was not provided with a floor plan of the factory to locate the flammable materials at the workplace, and up to now the families of the victims and survivors have not been approached by the company for assistance or compensation.

Tampaco Foils was established in 1977 and located in the export processing zone of Gazipur. The factory employed 150 workers and supplied to local and multi-national companies including Nestlé and British American Tobacco. The cause of the fire is yet to be fully investigated, but there is no doubt that the operation at Tampaco was sub-standard and that labour inspections by the Ministry of Labour and Employment and Ministry of Industry lacked independence and were ineffective. The factory building was an old structure with an extra floor added to it, there was only one working exit and the workplace was full of chemicals and flammable materials, leading to the quick spread of the fire. Crucially, there was no trade union, or worker-elected safety committee which under the law should be set up in facilities employing more than 50 workers. These legal violations should not have been tolerated by the international buyers or by the authorities, and they have a direct bearing on the fatalities.

We must not allow the tragic repetition of Rana Plaza and Tampaco in similar workplaces in Bangladesh. We believe that the major gap in bringing factories up to standards in your country is not technical expertise but poor governance. Labour inspections can only be independent and credible with transparency and the participation and monitoring by worker representatives from independent trade unions and, importantly, there must be zero tolerance for bribery and impunity.

With regard to justice for the victims at Tampaco, the TUC also urges the government of Bangladesh to set up, as soon as possible, a judicial inquiry committee to investigate the circumstances of the tragedy and to release the latest inspection reports at Tampaco to ensure accountability. The owners, responsible management and government officers should be pursued for public prosecution and criminal liability. Full assistance should be given to the victims for litigation and negotiations with the employer and buyers for compensation, long term medical treatment and rehabilitation.

We further urge the government to extend the National Tripartite Plan of Action on Fire Safety and Structural Integrity to the non-garment sector including the informal workplaces, by releasing statistics and reports of the labour inspections in these sectors as a first step. Lastly, the Ministry of Labour and Employment should follow, in good faith, the recommendations of the High Level Tripartite Mission by the ILO (April 2016) regarding freedom of association and ensure that independent trade unions and worker-elected safety committees can operate without interference.

Yours sincerely

FRANCES O'GRADY

General Secretary